

## **I Love a Cop: What Police Families Need to Know** ***Revised Edition***

By Ellen Kirschman, Ph.D.  
Guilford Press, 2006, Softcover, \$16.95

## **I Love a Fire Fighter: What the Family Needs to Know**

By Ellen Kirschman, Ph.D.  
Guilford Press, 2004, Softcover, \$14.95

Dr. Ellen Kirschman first published “I Love a Cop” in 1997, following up with “I Love a Fire Fighter” in 2004 (see below). In our altered operating environment following 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina, she revises “I Love a Cop” with practical suggestions for handling the “new normal” stresses of a law enforcement career, for both officers and their family members.

This edition assists readers in differentiating what they can change and what they cannot. She challenges long-standing myths such as ‘police marriages are doomed to fail because of the job.’ The truth is that reliable statistics on many aspects concerning the interaction of police work and our personal lives, such as divorce and suicide rates, are notoriously difficult to obtain.

Powerful elements of this book include multiple text boxes of pithy tips ranging from dealing with organizational stress to dealing with cops in crisis. Many of the suggestions pertain to the officer, their spouses/significant others, and to their children. Examples include, “Be proud of police work but don’t over identify,” “Try to separate what you can control from what you can’t,” and “Explore rather than ignore what your child is feeling by listening carefully.”

A second decisive element is the liberal use of personal stories gleaned from her two decades of working within the police culture with officers and their families. These stories breathe life into her chapters. Fritz’s reaction to his near shooting incident, Kent’s issues with his department after he was shot on duty, Jorge’s struggle to integrate his Hispanic heritage with the demands of his Field Training Officer, and

Lulu’s efforts to balance her femininity within the masculine dominated police field all illustrate the insights Dr. Kirschman is offering.

Dr. Kirschman traces the career paths most officers follow, offers insights on the sometimes overwhelming impact of organizational stress, and explains the spillover from job to home which impacts many families. For example, officers are trained to be emotionally controlled, hypervigilant, and compliance oriented on the job. However, these same traits of effective officers on the job often negatively impact the officers’ lives off the job.

In light of the “new normal” of post-9/11, post-Katrina policing, Dr. Kirschman significantly updated her chapters on trauma and resilience, domestic abuse, alcohol abuse, and treatment options. She updated and expanded the 30 pages of resources, including many international resources, from helpful websites to hotline numbers to recommended readings.

“I Love a Fire Fighter” is written in a similar vein. It is not, by any measure, a clone of “I Love a Cop.” Although fire fighting and law enforcement share many similarities, they are very different professions. She addresses the differences between paid fire fighters and volunteers (volunteers comprise 73% of the US fire service), and details the impact of the inclusion of emergency medical response into the fire service, adding that 60-80% of all fire department calls are medical.

The winning formula and strengths discussed above in “I Love a Cop” are also present in “I Love a Fire Fighter.”

Once again, I think a true strength of her work is the use of personal stories to illustrate her material. Jack and four of his groomsmen were an hour late to Jack's wedding to Jenny because they responded to a structure fire. We follow Tommy through the application and Academy processes, watch Jenna fight her first fire, and observe Barney struggle with alcoholism that almost ended his career.

Dr. Kirschman outlines the career steps of a fire fighter from the struggle to even join the service (there are 500-1000 applications for every open paid position!) through retirement. She offers insights into firehouse etiquette, and the role humor plays in the daily life of a firehouse.

In the chapter, "Beepers in your bedroom," she describes the two families to which fire fighters belong, their firehouse family and their home family. In contrast to law enforcement, who typically work alone or in pairs, "working fire fighters never go anywhere alone; when one goes, they all go (p. 7)." A challenge for some families is learning to share their fire fighter with the firehouse family, occasionally wondering which family is more important to the fire fighter.

Dr. Kirschman explores how fire fighters struggle with how much to tell their families about their work. A common family complaint is lack of communication; however, from the fire fighter perspective, he/she is attempting to spare their

spouse/significant other the auditory, visual, and olfactory traumas they experience on the job but to the family it feels as if they are being excluded. Once again, Dr. Kirschman offers cogent tips for dealing with the spillover between work and home.

She devotes chapters to organizational stress, diversity, on-the-job injuries, and alcoholism, divorce, and infidelity. She also has very thorough chapters on trauma and stress, treating traumatic stress, and getting help. She closes with 25 pages of resources, including helpful websites, organization contact information, hotline numbers, and recommended readings.

I highly recommend both books to mental health professionals, faith based helpers, peer supporters, and family members. Both books offer invaluable insights and constructive suggestions pertinent to these two honorable professions.

Dr. Kirschman, a clinical psychologist and consultant, has worked with public safety personnel, their agencies, and their families for over 20 years. She has written extensively about the public safety culture, and has been an invited speaker at the FBI Academy. She is the co-founder of the website, [www.policefamilies.org](http://www.policefamilies.org), dedicated to providing essential psychological information and improved access to family support services.